

here

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Keywords: black life; hip hop; poetry

Publication Type: Special Section - Creative

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where the spirits lay but never rest

their tongues dry as rust, untamed thirst

a bottomless belly vengeful and scorned

woven to those lost at shore

those the land yawned and stretched for, always slightly out of reach

here

the bayou. the lake. the river bend.

in the neck of earth. at the seams and sea

our bodies braided and tethered. mangled, and strewn,

stolen and stranded,

here.

in the houses our mothers built, in the waters of their names, we bathe, wade and wail

our tears licked and counted. the salt of their sweat

the pain a tomb,

the suffering

a cross, too bloody a burden

to bear

the price. a debt beyond what one can pay.

we're here

on this day, in this place,

limbs stretched east and west,

right here

in the desecrated body unforgotten, the wounded heart healed and claimed,

the forsaken prayer, answered, the violated space restored,

YES.

in this blue-black, mahogany, ebony, onyx skin

where God lurks and lulls the weary head.

akua naru (akua_naru@brown.edu) is a hip hop artist, producer, activist, and scholar from New Haven, CT, who theorizes the myriad experiences of Black women through rhyme along a sonic spectrum from jazz to soul. She has released four albums: "...the journey aflame (2011)," "Live & Aflame Sessions (2012)," "The Miner's Canary (2015)," and "The Blackest Joy (2018)" - three of which were on the label she co-founded, The Urban Era. naru has performed hundreds of shows in more than fifty countries across five continents with her six-piece band. She has been invited to lecture at Harvard University, University of Oxford, Cornell University, Princeton University, Fordham University, University of Cologne (Germany), Ahfad University for Women (Sudan), and Pivot Point College (China), among countless others. naru was the 2018-19 Nasir Jones Fellow at the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research (Harvard University) and a Race & Media Fellow at the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America (CSREA) at Brown University (2019-21). She is currently a Mellon Arts & Practitioner Fellow at the Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration at Yale University. In addition, naru is the Founder & Artistic Director of The Keeper Project, the first archive to focus on women's work throughout five decades of Hip Hop history, permanently housed at the Center for Digital Scholarship at Brown University Library.